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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the present state of education in Nigeria with emphasis on the cultural, socio-economic, and political influences affecting special education. After a brief summary of education in Nigeria since independence (1960), the paper looks at problems identified in special education and at Section 8, that portion of the National Policy on Education (1977) that provides policy direction for special education. Problems resulting from cultural influences on special education are identified (e.g., the low level of parental literacy and the superstitions and taboos of ethnic cultures). The section on socioeconomic influences contrasts conditions in developed and developing nations, notes current economic problems (oil glut and low per capita income), and a lack of funding for special education. Political influences (including corruption, mismanagement, and electoral violence and fraud) are also cited as problems which impede the development of an orderly system of special education. Among ten recommendations offered are the following: There should be "uncontaminated" free appropriate public education. Procedural safeguards should be inculcated into Section 8 of the National Policy on Education. The federal government should give strict guidelines to state and local governments. Teacher training should be strengthened. Excessive politicalization of social, economic, and educational decisions should be minimized. (DB)

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Cultural, Socio-Economic and Political Influences on Special Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Special education is a new phenomenon in the Nigerian education system; and the federal, state and local governments have made efforts to educate the handicapped and the gifted in the society. However, there are short and long term changes that are pragmatically needed to bring the efforts into reality. This paper focuses briefly on the present state of education in Nigeria, and vividly describes the cultural, socio-economic and political influences on special education. Appropriate recommendations are made to enhance the impact of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.

Introduction

Special education is a new phenomenon in the Nigerian educational system, and tremendous efforts have been made to improve the socio-economic and educational structures of the people. However, there are problems of inculcating special education into the general system, and of establishing a suitable philosophy that would reflect all the basic structures of the system. Many developing countries find themselves in this situation. Unfortunately, the policy makers tend to create more problems than solve existing ones. They institute change policies in theory, but pragmatically fail to infuse the policies into the general machinery of the socio-political system.

This paper presents a brief historical overview of Nigeria's educational system and vividly focuses on cultural, socio-economic and political influences on special education in Nigeria. Also, important recommendations are made to enhance the impact of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.

Historical Overview

Nigeria, like many other developing countries, is a country in a hurry. To meet the challenges of the 20th century and move toward the 21st century, Nigeria will have to take giant steps in a few years to cover what took the world powers centuries to achieve. Nigeria has a population of over seventy million people. She has 250 ethnic and language groups scattered all over the nineteen

states of the federation, and 299 local government areas (UNESCO, 1983). Nigeria gained her independence from Britian in 1960, yet she is very much dependent on other countries for socio-economic survival.

Nigeria has educational objectives which, to a large extent, should reflect the national philosophy. Eke (1972), former Federal Commissioner for Education, listed the national education objectives as follows:

1. To make Nigeria a strong and self-reliant nation;
2. To make Nigeria a great and dynamic economy;
3. To make Nigeria a just and egalitarian society;
4. To make Nigeria a free and democratic nation;
5. To make Nigeria a land full of opportunities for all its citizens (p. 3).

It is unfortunate that little attempt has been made to put the above objectives into practice. Currently, Nigeria imports her technical know-how and even food from other parts of the world. The economy is being revived; and the dream of an educated Nigerian is still to push a pen behind an office desk. In September 1976, Nigeria took a giant step to institute the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program with the aim of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition. However, after over nine years of its inception, the UPE still suffers from many setbacks such as poor organization,

poor financing, less emphasis on rural education and special education, and lack of specialists and experts (Obiakor, 1983; 1985).

Special Education in Nigeria

In 1975, Mrs. Ruth Ogbue (an administrator in the Special Education Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria), started reviewing the special education facilities in Nigeria. According to Ogbue,

> at present, there is no national policy on special education, therefore the responsibility for special education is left to the discretion of the individual states. Even where the education laws of the states make mention of special education, they give no definite mandate for educating handicapped children. (p. 69)

Ogbue (1975; 1981) exposed the present stand of special education in Nigeria. Her discoveries include the following:

1. 27% of the number of teachers involved in special education are trained specialists.
2. There are only five categories catered for: the blind and partially-sighted; the deaf and partially-hearing; the physically handicapped; the mentally retardates; and the hospitalized children.
3. No recognized facilities for pre-school handicapped children in all the categories.
4. A high percentage of the money spent came from individual gifts, local and international organizations and voluntary agencies.

5. Annual subventions came from the Ministries.
6. No systematic screening facility is available for the handicapped. The only assessment center in the whole country is in the Child Guidance Center, Lagos.
7. There are no facilities in the country for the purchase and technical maintenance of special education equipments and teaching aide.

Section 8--Section 8 is a portion of the National Policy on Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 1977) that spells out in details the directional policy of special education in Nigeria. It defines special education as the education of children and adults who have learning difficulty because of different sorts of handicaps due to circumstances of birth, inheritance, social position, mental and physical health pattern, or accident in latter life. This definition contains the specially gifted who are intellectually precocious and find themselves insufficiently challenged by the program of the normal school and who may take to stubbornness and apathy, in resistence to it. A remarkable aspect of Section 8 requires that a census be taken of all handicapped children and adults by age, sex, locality, and type.

While Section 8 in general is a commendable effort by the Federal Ministry of Education to enhance the recognition given to the handicapped and the gifted, it still appears that this group

of people are not well-served in various capacities. There is every indication that if Section 8 is taken seriously like Public Law 94-142 in the United States, the needs of the handicapped will be met. The fact remains that the nineteen states in Nigeria differ in the development of special education. Because of the level of illiteracy, the parents are not aware of their rights, and the policy makers have not made maximum efforts to educate the masses. There are few checks and balances on policies, especially those of the magnitude contained in Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.

Cultural Influence on Special Education

Culture plays a great part in framing the lifestyle of any group of people. The heterogeneous culture in Nigeria portrays the divergent beliefs prevalent in the general society. Traditionally, education emphasizes the use of the mind, body and soul. Fafunwa (1975) outlined the seven cardinal goals of traditional education. They are:

1. To develop the latent physical skills.
2. To inculcate respect for elders and those in a position of authority.
3. To develop intellectual skills.
4. To develop character.
5. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude toward honest labor.

6. To develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. To understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (p. 20).

The above goals appear to mold a person to suit the society, and not really molding the society to suit the person. Colonization reduced the impact of traditional education and introduced western culture, education and christianity. The focus became to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and superstition by introducing the 3 Rs (reading, arithmetic and writing) at a mushroom level, and to produce messengers and half-educated people who are intimidated by authority figures. Tribalism, nepotism, stateism, ethnocentism and religious fanatism are the results of this confusion created by western education. There also became a dramatic shift from what benefits Nigerians as a people who are willing to pragmatically foster the national educational objectives. Bude (1983) stated that the education from the British colonial masters still haunts the Nigerians.

At present, the impact of positive pressure groups in favor of the handicapped is little or nonexistent because of the level of illiteracy of the Nigerian people. Onwuegbu (1977) stated that care of the handicapped in Nigeria is relegated to the background because of ignorance, superstitions and taboos related to ethnic cultures. In a study conducted at the Federal Teachers Training

College, Ibadan, Ondo State of Nigeria, Onwuegbu revealed cultural factors that have affected the perception of the handicapped as follows:

1. Curse from God
2. Family Sins
3. Offenses against gods
4. Witches or wizards
5. Adultery
6. Misfortune
7. Ancestors
8. Misdeed of previous life
9. A warning from God
10. Evil spirit
11. Killing certain forbidden animals

The above perceptions show (a) the impact of culture in the Nigerian system, (b) the perceptual problems that confront the handicapped, and (c) the necessity of educating the masses and pragmatically enforcing Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.

Socio-economic Influence on Special Education

The effect of unfulfilled dreams of global development strategies has been sharply felt in the continent of Africa than in other continents of the world. Rather than improve the economic situation, there is greater succeptibility to the economic and social crises

in industrialized countries. Obiakor (1985) emphasized that "many challenges pose themselves to the continent" (p. 1).

Peter (1963) in a paper presented at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Conference in Geneva disclosed that productivity, the measure of the efficiency with which a nation's resources are transformed into commodities and services, is not simply a function of the amount of man power, raw materials, physical capital and equipment available and in use. He argued that productivity also depends heavily on the attitudes, knowledge and skills of people, which in turn reflect the education, training and complex organizations which modern technology requires. Staley (1963) in his classical work, made the following salient contrasts between developed and developing countries:

Developed	Developing
1. High level economy	1. Low level economy
2. Manufacturers	2. Consumers
3. High per capita income	3. Low per capita income
4. Large percentage of technical experts; Efficiency and experts	4. Peasants and agregarian, inefficiency and poor organization
5. Education geared toward the needs and philosophy of the people	5. Education was little relevance to the philosophy and needs of the people
6. Well organized and stable political system.	6. Transitional political system
7. Independent for many years	7. Recently antonomous or still colonial
8. Preventive health programs; Low mortality rate	8. Disease and squalor; High mortality rate

As stated earlier, the Federal government of Nigeria has made tremendous efforts to improve the socio-economic and educational

structures of the people. Freedom and self-reliance are magnificent dreams of any country. Provisions of the handicapped and gifted are well-defined in Section 8 of the National Policy on Education. From 1974-75 financial year, the Federal Ministry of Education was deeply involved in the gigantic task of making preparations for the six-year-old throughout the federation. Between 1974 and 1977, the federal government had spent more than one billion naira in the UPE Program. In the Third National Development Plan, 1975-80, the educational sector maintained its priority ratings of over 2.5 billion naira (The Federal Ministry of Education, 1977).

Despite the efforts and good intentions of the federal government of Nigeria, other problems are prevalent. The present oil-glut, manipulated by the world powers, pose an insurmountable problem. Nigeria had relied heavily on oil as the chief yielder of her national income. The per capita income is low; and the economy is at a lower level. There are few teachers to handle the "factory" classrooms; and those teachers are hardly paid on time. There is even greater doubt that an appropriate free public education exists in the Nigerian system. Some states are more funded in the provision of trained personnel, teachers, and specialists. The parental and general attitude toward the handicapped has not effectively changed. In some states, there are inaccessible roads to the remote villages (Ogbue, 1975), and this provides a clear proof that many handicapped

children are undocumented and neglected. The models of funding are not well defined--Is funding through head-count of children, through counting of services or through the different educational levels/grades? Ogbue (1981) discovered that funds are provided by individuals as gifts, by local and international organizations and voluntary agencies. There is greater doubt that funds are provided for procedural safeguards during mediation, impartial hearing, appeal process and surrogate parenting. The impact of Section 8 is not felt as funds are rarely provided for screening, referral, evaluation, identification and individualized education program (IEP).

Political Influence on Special Education

Nigeria is governed by the military. For the second time since independence in 1960, a democratic constitution that was inefficient was overthrown in a military coup. Each coup was due to the decay that had three components: staggering corruption, crippling economic waste and mismanagement, and the vitiating of the electoral process through violence and fraud (Diamond, 1984). Since independence, the state has been the chief arena for the accumulation of wealth and the acquisition of resources. Much of the wealth is grossly accessible through government contracts, jobs, import licenses, development projects, to mention a few; and little is accumulated through any substantially-independent

business. As a result, there is always a desperate struggle for state power. Politics becomes a warfare and a matter of life and death (Ake, 1981). Such corruptive politics transcends virtually all socio-economic, educational, and political decisions in Nigeria. Urwick (1983) revealed that the former military government instituted the UPE program not necessarily to meet the needs of the citizens of the country, but to boost its political credibility.

It is apparent that the transitional political system in Nigeria affects her socio-economic and educational progress. It is also uncertain who will be in power, and which decision will change tomorrow. Since the institution of the UPE program in September 1976, and the provision of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education in 1977, four different governments (three of them military and one a constitutionally-elected government) have ruled Nigeria. During the military rules, a system of diarchy to provide structural supports and integrity for crucial regulatory institutions, have flourished. The four governments have had four different Federal Ministers and four different nineteen State Commissioners of Education with highly divergent educational policies and priorities. How can a stable educational policy be maintained in Nigeria with this consistent change of educational administrators and personnel? How are we sure that Section 8 is not another political tool masqueraded as a flamboyant educational policy? Is it not clear

that school children, especially the handicapped, suffer with such inconsistencies in educational policy changes?

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aforementioned details explain the present state of special education in Nigeria. Section 8 of the National Policy on Education clearly defines the role of the federal government with regards to provision of services for the handicapped and the gifted. The level of illiteracy and cultural beliefs have influenced the perceptions of the handicapped in Nigeria. Also, the impact of political transition is felt on socio-economic and educational decisions in the country. While greater efforts have been made by the federal, state, and local governments to provide services for the handicapped, the Federal Ministry of Education needs to make short and long term changes to enhance the impact of special education. To fulfill the dream of Section 8, the following recommendations are necessary ingredients:

1. There should be "uncontaminated" free appropriate public education.
2. There should be adequate tools and funds for screening, referral, evaluation, identification and planning the IEPS.
3. Procedural safeguards should be inculcated into Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.
4. Political stability should be maintained to avoid brain drain of Nigerial specialists at a national or international level.

5. Section 8 calls for mass education of the people through radios, newspapers, churches, mosques and village chiefs.
6. The federal government should give strict guidelines to state and local governments.
7. Teacher training of specialists and related professionals should be strengthened.
8. Models of funding should be well-defined, in an inclusive way, from pre-school to college levels.
9. Excessive politicization of all social, economic and educational decisions should be minimized in order to provide growth at all levels.
10. Societal problems like tribalism, nepotism, stateism, ethnocentism, and religious fanaticism should be eradicated with strict laws at all echelons of government.

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Dr. Obiakor worked as a school teacher for many years in Nigeria. His Ph.D. degree is in Special Education and in the related area of Educational Management and Development. He earned other graduate degrees in Educational Diagnostics and Instructional Psychology. Dr. Obiakor has published numerous articles on the Nigerian educational system. Presently, he is co-authoring a handbook on the philosophical systems of education in African nations, with particular focus on Nigeria, Sudan and Tanzania. Dr. Obiakor is a member of the Council of Exceptional Children, Phi Delta Kappa, and the National Association for the Visually-Handicapped.